

A MOST NEEDFUL PRAYER CONCERNING THE HOLY SPIRIT

NO. 954

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, OCTOBER 9, 1870,
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“Cast me not away from your presence; and take not your holy spirit from me.”
Psalm 51:11.*

THIS Psalm is beyond all others a photograph of penitent David. You have probably seen that interesting slab of stone which bears on its surface indications of the fall of raindrops in a primeval shower; this Psalm preserves the marks of David's teardrops, for the inspection and instruction of succeeding generations. Or what if I change the figure, and borrow another from an Oriental fable? They said of old that pearls were formed by drops of spring rain falling into shells upon the shores of the sea, so here, the drops of David's repentance are preserved in inspired Scripture as precious, priceless pearls.

This Psalm is as full of meaning as of tenderness. I know not how large a literature has gathered around it, but certainly writers of all creeds and ages have used their pens to illustrate it, and there is room for as many more. It is a perfectly inexhaustible Psalm, its deep shaft of sorrowful humiliation leads to veins of golden ore, the stones of it are the place of sapphires. We shall confine ourselves, this morning, to this one verse, not with any prospect of being able to bring out all its meaning, but rather hoping to make use of it, and to find produced in ourselves a measure of the feeling which it so solemnly expresses. If we should be made to drink into its spirit, and then to pour out our hearts at the feet of our Redeemer, it will be an unspeakable blessing.

We shall use the text first in its evident sense as *the utterance of a penitent saint*, secondly, we shall employ it, as I think it may be used, as *the cry of an anxious church*, and then, thirdly, but in a very modified sense, we shall put it into the mouths of *awakened but as yet unsaved souls*.

I. First, then, in its largest, widest, and primitive sense, we must regard this verse as THE CRY OF A PENITENT CHILD OF GOD. “Cast me not away from your presence; and take not your holy spirit from me.”

This will certainly be fit language for any child of God here who has fallen into gross sin. I trust, my brother, this may not be your case, but if it should be, hesitate not when you have fallen into David's sin, if you feel David's repentance, to offer David's prayer, “Cast me not away from your presence; take not your holy spirit from me.” Backsliding Christian, you may yet return, there are pardons for sins of deepest dye. The Lord will heal your broken bones, and restore unto you the joy of His salvation.

But probably far more of us will have an equal necessity to utter this supplication on account of gradual inward backsliding from the former closeness of our walk with God. One great sin when committed startles the soul into repentance, but a continuation of sin will be found to be even more dangerous. Though no one of the company of our transgressions may be a peculiarly striking iniquity, yet the whole together may produce an equally lamentable result upon the soul. White ants will devour a carcass as surely and as speedily as a lion. Many threads of silk twisted together may hold a man as fast as one band of iron.

Come, let us consider. Many of us have been saved by divine grace, and barely saved, but we have been made to walk in the light of God's countenance, we have been somewhat like Daniel, men greatly beloved and highly favored. Now, have we acted in conformity with such distinguishing mercy? Have we manifested a holy jealousy such as divine love ought to produce in us?

Must not some here confess that their love has by degrees grown cold, or at least lukewarm? Must not many of us acknowledge that we have been very carnal, so as to have been overjoyed with worldly prosperity, or over-damped with worldly adversity? Must we not many of us acknowledge that we have been slothful in the Master's service?

Are there not some among you who for the last few months have done little or nothing for the church and truth of Christ? You were once diligent in your Master's business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; but that has gone, your former zeal and fidelity have departed from you, unstable as water you do not now excel. With this there has crept over some hearts a listlessness in prayer, a lack of enjoyment in reading the Word, a deadness towards spiritual things, a carelessness of walk, and a carnal security of spirit. Dr. Watts' verse might suit some of you sadly well—

*“In vain we tune our formal songs,
In vain we strive to rise;
Hosannas languish on our tongues,
And our devotion dies.”*

Now, in such cases, my brother or sisters, if you are conscious of an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God, if you are obliged to confess that the former days were better than now, and to own that the consolations of the Lord are small with you, I do, in deep and anxious sympathy with your condition exhort you to use from your heart the language of the psalmist, “Cast me not away from your presence; and take not your holy spirit from me.”

You will perceive that a soul which can really pray thus has life, true spiritual life still struggling within. An ungodly man does not ask that he may abide in nearness to God, rather would he say, “Whither shall I flee from your presence?” He does not seek God's Spirit, he is quite content that the evil spirit should rule him, and that the spirit of this world should be predominant in him. But here is life, struggling, panting, crushed, painful life, but life for all that, the higher spiritual life which sighs after God.

I have seen in the corner of the garden a little fire covered up with many damp autumn leaves, I have watched its feeble smoke, and known thereby that the fire still lived, and was fighting with the damp which almost smothered it, so here these desires and sighs and cries are as so much smoke, indicating the divine fire within. “Cast me not away from your presence,” shows a soul that loves God's presence, “Take not your holy spirit from me,” reveals a heart that desires to be under the dominion of that Spirit yet more completely.

Here are signs of life, though they may appear to be as indistinct and doleful as hollow groans far underground, such as have been heard from men buried alive, voices from the sepulcher, choked and ghostly, but telling of life in the morgue, grappling with death, and crying out, “O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me?”

Let us look at these words a little closely since I have shown you how applicable they are to us, and how they indicate spiritual life. I think when David used them he may have looked back in his mind to that portion of sacred history with which he was conversant. He remembered when Adam and Eve, having rebelled against their Maker, were driven out from God's presence, when the cherubim with flaming sword blocked the gate of Eden's blighted garden.

“My God,” he seems to say, “I too have offended. Your presence is my paradise, my Eden, all else is wilderness to me—barren, thorn-bearing wilderness. O drive me not out, cast me not away from your presence. Let me but know You love me and I shall be in Eden. Let me but know that I am still Your child, Your favored one, and I will find in that sweet assurance my paradise, my all. Let me be a courtier in Your palace, or even a doorkeeper in Your house, and I will be content, but from Your presence banish me not, else do You wither all my joys.”

Did he think of Cain, too, and was his mind so distressed that he was half afraid lest he should become like that marked man who went out from the presence of the Lord to be a wanderer and a vagabond, and find henceforth no rest for the sole of his feet? Did he feel that if he were exiled from God's presence he would be just as wretched as the accursed Cain himself? Did the thought of that first manslayer put an emphasis into the prayer, "Cast me not away from Your presence"?

Do you think he recollected Pharaoh too, in that memorable night when the cloud that imaged the presence of JEHOVAH came down between Israel and Egypt, and the dark side of it was towards Pharaoh? For God indignantly turned His back upon the haughty king, while His face shone lovingly upon His chosen but afflicted people. Did he mean by our text to say, "Lord, turn not Your back on me. Cause not such trouble and confusion in my soul as ensued in Egypt's hosts when the night of Your wrath fell on it. O cast me not away from Your presence"?

Is it possible that the penitent monarch, while penning this Psalm, thought of Samson too, and therefore uttered the latter part of the verse, "Take not your holy spirit from me"? Did he remember the strong man who could tear a lion as though it were a kid when the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, or smite the Philistines hip and thigh till he piled them up in heaps when God was with him, but who, when his locks had been shorn, and the Spirit was gone, was ignominiously bound, and with blinded eyes was made to do a mill horse's work?

Did he think of the hero of Gaza and say, "My God, take not Your Holy Spirit from me. Leave me not to be the sport of my enemies, cast me not off as one whom You can no longer employ for high and honorable service. Take not Your Holy Spirit from me"? Or is it not very likely that if he thought of all these, yet his eye was peculiarly fixed upon one between whom and himself there had been a very close relation, I mean Saul, his predecessor on the throne.

That man had been chosen to rule God's people Israel, but he proved rebellious, and he was cast away from God's presence, so that God would not hear him in the hour of distress. No Urim and Thummim would give him a divine response, no prophet would regard him, no priest could present for him acceptable sacrifice, he was cast away from God's presence, and the Spirit was finally gone from him. Even that ordinary measure of the Spirit which he had once enjoyed was gone.

Saul was once among the prophets, but we find him by and by among the witches. Saul had lost all prudence in the council chamber, all success in the battlefield. The voice of Him by whom kings reign had gone forth against him, and broken his scepter: "Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has also rejected you from being king."

All this David remembered with a shudder, and his heart said to him, "What, shall the son of Jesse be like the son of Kish? Shall the second anointed of Samuel be like the first, of whom the Lord said, 'It repents me that I have set up Saul to be king'"? He became overwhelmed with dreadful apprehension, and turned to the Lord with a bitter cry, "Oh, can it be, my God, shall I also be cast away from Your presence, and Your Spirit taken from me?" He bows himself in agonizing prayer with this as his petition, "Cast me not away from your presence; and take not your holy spirit from me."

Give me your patient attention, you who love the Lord, while I try to give you many reasons why such a prayer as this should arise out of the depths of your hearts, and leap from your lips. As for the first petition of the text, "Cast me not away from your presence," my brethren, we have need to present it, for God's presence is to us our comfort amid affliction, for He is "a very present help in trouble." It is our greatest delight, of all our true joys it is the source and sum, we call Him by that name, "God our exceeding joy."

The Lord's presence is our strength. God with us is our banner of victory. When He is not with us we are weaker than water, but in His might we are omnipotent. His presence is our sanctification, by beholding the glory of the Lord we become like Him, communion with God has a transforming power upon us. This too, is our highest glory, angels have no brighter honor. And this shall be our heaven hereafter, to dwell in the immediate and unveiled presence of the Lord in His own palace forever.

I cannot, however, dwell at length on this first part of the text, and therefore I have summarized the reasons for its use, but the second I shall ask your attention to in greater detail. “Take not your holy spirit from me.”

Remember, my brethren, it was the Holy Spirit who first of all *regenerated us*. If we have indeed been born again from above, our new birth was by the Holy Ghost, “Not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God,” are we made this day spiritual men. If, therefore, we have not the Spirit, or it is possible that the Spirit is taken from us, the very essence of our spiritual life is gone, we are utterly dead, we are no longer numbered with the living people of the living God. The Holy Ghost is not to us a luxury, but a necessity. We must have the Spirit of God or we live not at all in a spiritual sense. If any man has not the Spirit of Christ he is none of His, without the supernatural work of this divine person upon our nature we are not numbered with the family of God at all.

Remember, my dear friends, that into the Holy Ghost you and I, when we professed our faith in Jesus, *were baptized*. We were immersed “into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost,” and this day, without the Holy Spirit, you and I are fraudulent professors, baptized deceivers, and arrant hypocrites. If we were not, indeed, baptized into the Holy Ghost, how dare we be baptized into the outward symbol? As he who if a communicant unworthily, eats and drinks condemnation to himself, even so does the unworthy participant in baptism. This day we are bearing a false profession, we wear a fictitious name, we are as those who said they were Jews and were not, but did lie. We number ourselves with the people of God, but if we have not the Spirit we shall at last be numbered with the castaways. See to this, I pray you, and O may the preacher see to this himself!

Remember, too, that the Spirit of God is to each one of us the spirit of *adoption*. “You have not received,” says the apostle, “the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.” Without the Spirit of God then we have no spirit of adoption, we have lost that best of all blessings, the sonship, which places us in possession of all the treasures of heaven as joint-heirs with Christ. In the wilderness, it was the sonship of our Lord which Satan assaulted when he tempted the Savior. “If you are the Son of God,” said he. Christ the Lord, however, stood fast upon this point, and was not moved, and therefore He conquered. Let anything come between us and the distinct recognition of our sonship towards God, and we are undone.

Lord, if it so pleases You, suffer Satan to rob me of all my goods, as Job was deprived of all his treasures, and let the desire of my eyes be taken from me, and my eyes themselves no more behold the sweet light of day, but “take not your holy spirit from me,” for then my very relation to You would vanish from my heart. While I can say, “My God, my Father,” I have enough, though all else be gone, but if You be no Father to me, or I have no spirit of adoption towards You, then I am undone indeed. “Take not your holy spirit from me,” is a needful prayer, for to do so would be to end our spiritual life, to cast us out as mere pretenders, to treat us as trees “twice dead, plucked up by the roots.”

Further, let us not forget that it is by the Holy Spirit that we have *access to God*. “We have access by one Spirit unto the Father,” says the apostle. Now, access to God is among the richest of our privileges. Let a man be able to take his burdens to God, and it little matters how heavy they may be. Let him be able to tell his needs to his Father, and it little signifies how great those needs may be, for God will supply them all according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. But take away the mercy seat, or block up the road by which the believer reaches it, withdraw his power in prayer, and his faith in the promise—and all this you do if you take away the Holy Spirit from him—then is the believer ruined indeed.

Praying in the Holy Spirit is the only true praying. O may we never cease from it! “He helps our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought.” Without His teaching, then, what stammering prayers, what wandering prayers, what prayers that are not prayers at all we should offer! We must have the Spirit or else our great resource and remedy of prayer becomes unavailable. On your knees then, you that have wandered and deserve to be forsaken and deserted of the Holy Spirit, I beseech

you cry mightily, “Take not your holy spirit from me,” and let your plea be in the name and merit of Christ Jesus the Savior.

Moreover brethren, the Holy Spirit is our great *instructor*. In these times, when errorists of all kinds are anxious to mislead us, some from the side of credulity, and others from the side of skepticism, we have need to pray every day, “Take not your holy spirit from me.” One says, “Lo, here!” another, with equal vehemence, cries, “Lo, there!” We have not only “another gospel,” but we have fifty other gospels now preached. Though there is but one foundation and one salvation, yet be there those among us who proclaim with earnestness this, and that, and the other doctrines as fundamental, though their teaching is of the flesh, and not of God. The young and unwary must often have cause, in great bewilderment, to inquire, “How shall I know the truth? By what means shall I discern the way?”

Now, the Spirit of God is given to “lead us into all truth,” and reverently sought, He will be given to all who lack wisdom, to teach them the things of Christ, by taking those precious things and revealing them unto their hearts. But oh! without the Holy Ghost, our patient and infallible teacher, we should be like a child in the woods when the sun has gone down, wandering hither and thither, torn with briars and fearful of the wolf, crying in the dark for its father, or like a traveler lost on one of our southern downs, surrounded by a clinging mist, not knowing which way he goes, and in constant danger of falling from some lofty cliff into the sea. “Take not your holy spirit from me.” You puzzled and bewildered children of God, here is a prayer for you, and God fulfill it to you according to His infinite mercy.

Again, I pray that I may be helped to magnify the Holy Ghost in your esteem, making you to love Him and worship Him more than ever. Dear brethren, we want the Holy Spirit as our *Comforter*. This is one of His names, the Paraclete, the Comforter. He has come on purpose to assuage the griefs of His children, and bring peace into their minds. Now, whatever our troubles may be, if we have such a Comforter, we can afford to welcome them. Our adversities may be innumerable, but with the Holy Ghost’s presence, we rise above them all. But, O my God, if the Comforter is gone, then my brain reels, my spirit sinks, I give up the conflict, I cannot endure to the end, for only by His consolations shall I in patience possess my soul.

Though I might enlarge, I must not, for time reproves me. The Holy Ghost is our *Sanctifier*, and when we feel sin raging within, how can we hope to conquer without His aid? If He should leave us, if He who began the work does not keep His hand to it, how will it ever be complete? Holiness is too divine a work to be wrought in us by any inferior hand. He who made the first rough draft must put in the perfecting stroke, or all will remain incomplete.

And He, also, is *our power* for practical service—the “power from on high” for which apostles tarried of old. If the Holy Ghost be not with the preacher, vain are his pleadings with men. If He be not with the teacher in his class, with any worker for God, what is their labor but beating the air, or reasoning with the waves? If no other person can pray this prayer from his inmost soul, at least the preacher can, it rises up, as the Lord knows, from the very center of my heart. I dread beyond all things the Spirit’s withdrawal. Death has not half the terror of that thought. I would sooner die a thousand times, than lose the helpful presence of the Holy Ghost.

I will just one moment allude to a controversy which has raged around this text, and then pass on. Some have said, “Then a true saint may be cast away, lose the Spirit of God, and perish.” The argument being, that there is no need for a man to pray for that which God is sure to give, or pray against an evil which God will never inflict. The answer is briefly this—I would not dare to pray, “Cast me not away from your presence; and take not your Holy Spirit from me,” if I had not the promise that He will not cast me away from His presence, nor take His Holy Spirit from me. Instead of its not being right to pray for what God will give, I venture to say it is not right to pray for what God will not give, the promise is not a reason for not praying, but the very best reason in all the world for praying.

Because I earnestly believe that no real child of God will ever be cast away from God’s presence, therefore I pray that *I* may not be. And because I am persuaded that from no really regenerated soul will God ever utterly take His Spirit, therefore, for that reason above all others, do I pray that He may never

take His Spirit *from me*. I say, again, it is absurd to argue that a thing which God promises to give is not to be asked for, for has He not Himself said, “I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them”? The fact that the continuance of the Holy Spirit is the subject of an inspired prayer, rather strengthens than weakens the certainty of the promised blessing.

Moreover, be it remembered, that God may partially take away His presence and His Spirit, and yet after all never remove His everlasting and eternal love from that person, for He may only withdraw for a season, for wise reasons, to return again afterwards with fullness of grace. Against this partial desertion we are, however, allowed and encouraged to pray.

Once again, remember that when a man has sinned, as David did, and is bowed down as David was, he cannot always pray in language which would be precisely suitable for a well-assured saint. He has doubts as to whether he is saved, and therefore he does well to pray on the lowest ground as though he were not surely a saint, but might prove an apostate after all. It is most natural for a backslider to use expressions implying the very worst, expressions rather of fear than confidence, rather of distress than repose. David cries like Jonah out of the belly of hell, “Cast me not away from your presence.” The lower down we get, the better.

I frequently find that I cannot pray as a minister, I find that I cannot sometimes pray as an assured Christian, but I bless God I can pray as a sinner. I begin again with, “God be merciful to me a sinner,” and by degrees rise up again to faith, and onward to assurance. When assurance is gone, and faith is weak, it is a great comfort that we may pray a sinner’s prayer, the words of which may be inaccurate as to our actual condition, but correctly describe our doubts and fears, and supposed condition.

II. But now I shall pass on to take these words and use them as THE VOICE OF AN ANXIOUS CHURCH.

The true church of God may well pray, “Cast me not away from your presence; and take not your holy spirit from me.”

Brethren, I shall speak pointedly to this church, over which the Holy Ghost has made me an overseer. Let us, my dear brethren, remember that there have been churches of old which God had cast away from His presence. Where are the churches of Asia that were once like golden candlesticks? Where are Sardis, and Thyatira, and Laodicea? Can you find as much as a relic of them? Are not their places empty, and void, and waste? Look at the church of Rome, once a martyr church, valiant for truth, and strong in the Lord, now the very personification of Antichrist, and utterly gone aside to the worship of images, and all manner of idolatries, an apostate and defiled thing, and no more a church of Christ at all.

Now, what has happened to other churches may happen to this church, and we ought to be very earnestly on our guard lest so it should be. In your own time you yourselves have seen churches flourishing, multiplying, walking in peace and love, but for some reason not known to us, but perceived by the watcher who jealously surveys the churches of God, a root of bitterness has sprung up, divisions have devoured them, heresy has poisoned them, and the place that once gloried in them scarcely knows them now. Existing they may be, but little more, dwindling in numbers, barren of grace, they are rather an encumbrance than power for good.

Recollect, then, beloved that the power of any church for good lies in the presence of God, and that sin in the church may grieve the Lord, so that He may no more frequent her courts, or go forth with her armies. It is a dire calamity for a church when the Lord refuses any longer to bless her work, or reveal Himself in her ordinances, then is she driven of the wind hither and thither like a barque derelict and castaway.

The Lord may, because of sin, take away His Holy Spirit from a church. The spirit of love may depart, the spirit of prayer may cease, the spirit of zeal and earnestness may remove, and the Spirit which converts the souls of men may display His power elsewhere, but not in the once-favored congregation. Let me impress upon you that all this may readily happen if we grieve the Holy Spirit as some churches have done.

My beloved, let me refresh your memories with the recollection that the great power of the church does not lie in the power of her organizations. You may have good schemes for work, wisely arranged and managed, but they will be a failure without the divine energy. Too often excellent methods are rigidly adhered to, and confidently relied upon, and yet without the Holy Spirit they are sheer folly.

We are told that in unhappy Paris, when first the mails were stopped, the drivers of the mail carts took their seats upon their boxes and sat there, though no horses were forthcoming. Red tape commands as much reverence as the magic cord of the Brahmins. Formal routine satisfies many. Preachers, deacons, and teachers sit on the boxes of their mail coaches for the appointed time, but the power which moves the whole is too much forgotten, and in some cases ignored.

Souls are not saved by systems, but by the Spirit. Organizations without the Holy Ghost are windmills without wind. Methods and arrangements without grace are pipes from a dry conduit, lamps without oil. Even the most scriptural forms of church-government and effort, are null and void without the "power from on high." Remember, too, that the power of the church does not lie in her gifts.

You might every one of you have all wisdom, and be able to understand all mysteries, and we might all speak with tongues, and be numbered among the eloquent of the earth, but our church might not flourish for all this. Gifts glitter, but are not always gold. Gifts may puff up, but they cannot build up if the Holy Spirit be not there. Strife and divisions, emulations and jealousies are, through the evil of our nature, the very frequent consequences of the possession of great talents by a church, and these things are unmingled evils.

Nor does the power of the church consist in her wealth. When the Spirit is with her, sufficient treasure is laid at her feet, and the "daughter of Tyre is there with a gift," but if the Spirit of God be gone, we might say of all the money that was ever poured into ecclesiastical coffers, by those who sought to strengthen her therewith, "Your money perish with you!" Gold avails nothing to a church devoid of grace, it does but increase the evil which is corrupting within. O you vainglorious churches, you may gild your domes, you may make your pillars of alabaster, and cover your altars with precious stones, you may clothe your priests in scarlet and in fair white linen, you may make your ceremonies imposing, your processions gorgeous, and your music enchanting, but all this avails nothing if the Spirit of God be gone, all that remains for you is as sounding brass, and a tinkling cymbal.

Nor, and here let me press this upon you, does the strength of a church lie merely in her doctrines. I know not that Laodicea held false doctrines, yet was she nauseous to the Lord. Orthodox churches may become lifeless corpses. Truth may be held in unrighteousness. Creeds most accurate may be but the grave clothes in which a dead church is wrapped to be carried to her burial. Men have had sound views of truth, and yet have been unsound in life, and sound in nothing else but in the sleep of carelessness.

Nor does the strength of a church lie in her numbers. Congratulate yourselves that your membership is counted by thousands, but if you become a mob and not an army, or an army without a divine leader, and without the enthusiasm which only the present Spirit of God can give, what are your numbers but the source of difficulty, corruption, and failure? You are like so many grains of sand that cannot unite, you are altogether broken, and poured out like water if the Spirit be gone. What availed the number of the Scribes and priests of old when God had left them to their own blindness? What can the largest flock of sheep do without a shepherd? What is a large church without the Lord's presence, but a mass of chaff to be scattered with a whirlwind, or to rot on the threshing floor?

So, too, is it with the past history and the prestige of a church, it is vain to depend on these. There is far too great an aptitude among us to fall back on what our fathers did, or what we ourselves achieved ten or twenty years ago. My word to you, my dearly beloved church is, "Hold fast that which you have, that no man take your crown." Our crown as a church has been this—we have been a soul-winning church. We have had nothing else whereof to boast, but this is our claim—we have sought the souls of men, and God has given them to us. To Him be all the glory. Shall we lose that crown through slackness and lukewarmness? It must be so unless we cry again and again, "Take not your holy spirit from me." The Holy Ghost we want to abide with us in all the excellence of His glorious power, and if we have

Him not, woe worth the day, our Shiloh shall become a desolation, and this beautiful house of our assembling shall become a hissing and a reproach.

Brethren, I will use an image which will come home to your minds at once. Any church of God from which the Spirit has departed becomes very like that great empire with whose military glory the world was dazzled, and whose strength made the nations tremble. France, mistress of arms, queen of beauty, arbiter of politics, how soon has she fallen! I have heard many reasons given for her sudden overthrow, but I scarce believe any of them to be sufficient to account for such a fall.

In an hour, like a lily broken at the stalk, she has withered. On a sudden, as though the hand of God had gone out against her, her glory has departed. Why was it? I do not believe that it was any lack of courage in her soldiery, nor do I even think that there was more than usual deficiency of skill in her commanders, her hour had come, she was weighed in the balances and found wanting, and her prowess failed her as in a moment. The nation once so great now lies bleeding at her victor's feet, pitied of us all none the less because her folly continues the useless fight.

Just so have we seen it in churches, may we never so see it here. Everybody may be saying, "How wondrously that church flourishes! What power! What influence! What numbers!" And on a sudden some radical evil which had been eating out the very soul of the church may come to its issue, and then as in a moment all the apparent prosperity will subside, and the Philistines will rejoice. May it not be so! May our prayer be, "Take not your holy spirit from us."

Travelers in Egypt point to spots where once grew luxurious vegetation when the soil was constantly irrigated by the rich stream of the Nile, but now the irrigation having ceased, the sand of the Libyan desert has conquered the fertile ground and annexed it to the wilderness. After this sort, churches irrigated by the Spirit once produced rich harvests of souls, left of the Spirit the sand of the world has covered them, and where once all was green and beautiful there is nothing but the former howling wilderness.

It awakens melancholy reflections when we hear of the bodies of old Egyptian kings, proud lords of millions of men, dragged by our discoverers out of their secret chambers in the pyramids and exposed to every vulgar eye. The great sarcophagus has had its lid uplifted, and the monarch who once ruled the world has been taken out, and his corpse unrolled for the sake of a little old linen, and an ounce or two of the embalming gum. Poor mummy! once a Pharaoh whose voice could shake a nation and devastate continents, now used to heat an Arab's kettle or to furnish an object for a museum.

So with a church, alive by the divine indwelling, God gives it royalty, and makes it a king and priest unto Himself among the sons of men, its influence is felt further than it dreams, the world trembles at it, for it is fair as the sun, clear as the moon, and terrible as an army with banners, but when the Spirit of God is departed, what remains but its old records, ancient creeds, title-deeds, traditions, histories and memories? It is in fact a mummy of a church rather than a church of God, and it is better fitted to be looked at by antiquarians than to be treated as an existent agency. May we never come to this! May the Tabernacle abide in prosperity till the Temple of God shall be among men. Let our whole church lift up the prayer, "Cast me not away from your presence; and take not your holy spirit from me."

III. But time outruns me, and therefore I must close by regarding this as THE CRY OF AN AWAKENED SINNER.

Not properly nor accurately, but still instructively, I may use it. O, unconverted man, if you are indeed anxious about your soul pray this prayer, "Cast me not away from your presence; and take not your holy spirit from me." Say you thus to the Lord, "O You most merciful God, pronounce not yet that word, 'Depart, you cursed.' My God, cast me not away as reprobate, let Your long-suffering spare me a little longer, till Your grace has saved me. Let me still stand on praying ground and pleading terms with You. 'Take not your holy spirit from me.' It is true I have not Your Spirit as I gladly would have it, but still I hear Your Word. O let me not be denied the hearing of Your Gospel which perchance may bless my soul. Still have I Your Holy Book, and Your Spirit's voice is heard therein, may it lead me to Jesus.

O take not away Your Book from me, shut me not up in hell, where I shall feel the threatenings, but never know the promises of Your Word.

Sometimes Your Spirit touches my conscience, hard as my heart is, it sometimes trembles. Sometimes I feel myself inclined to love You if I could; I feel some sighing and yearning after You. Take not these beginnings of grace from me. O God, I wait upon You in the hearing of Your Word, and sometimes I hope Your power, Your life, will come to me, and I, even I, the chief of sinners, shall yet be saved. O take not away that hope utterly and forever. Swear not in Your anger that I shall never enter into Your rest, but rather turn Your pitying eye on me, and break my heart this day, and bind it up with the dear Savior's love. Save me, O save me, with Your great salvation, for the sake of Jesus, Your Son."

Have you prayed that prayer, dear hearer? It shall be heard. But hear what God speaks to you, it is this—"Believe you now this day, and trust in Jesus, and you shall be saved." Come you now and cast yourself before the cross, and trust yourself for time and for eternity in His dear hands, who there poured out His soul unto death for sinners. Then shall you know of a truth that He will never cast you away from His presence, for "Him who comes to me," says Jesus, "I will in no wise cast out." Then shall you know that the Spirit shall not be taken from you, for He is with them that believe, and shall abide in them forever. God bless you, every one of you, for Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—PSALM 51; ROMANS 8:1-18.

Taken from The C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.